

EPA

Moderator: Lina Younes
September 30, 2011
12:00 p.m. ET

Operator: Good afternoon. My name is (Andrea), and I will be your conference operator today. At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the EE Sub-Grant Program.

All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. If you should need assistance during the call, please press star then zero and an operator will come back online to assist you. Thank you.

Ms. Lina Younes, you may begin your conference.

Lina Younes: Yes, good afternoon and good morning for our friends in the west coast. This is the last call of our series on our environmental education sub-grant solicitation for 2011. My name is Lina Younes.

I'm the acting director for the Office of Environmental Education at EPA and I'm here today with the manager of our grants program, Ms. Karen Scott. And today, we're going to be discussing the environmental education sub-grant solicitation. EPA has issued two requests for proposal under current request for proposal, RFP entitled, Environmental Education Sub-Grants.

EPA will have approximately \$1.5 million in funding available for environmental education projects that award sub-grants of \$5,000 or less.

The purpose of the sub-grants is to promote environmental stewardship and help develop knowledgeable and responsible students, teachers and citizens.

EPA expects to award 10 grants nationwide for \$150,000 each and will accept applications until November 8th 2011.

This is a new solicitation and seeks to fund a type of project, the awarding sub-grant this office has not funded in the past.

Our past RFPs have been highly competitive. EPA has been able to fund less than 10 percent of the applications as we've seen most years. Please note that this morning we posted a corrected version of the request for proposal, the RFP on our Web site.

The Web site address is <http://www.epa.gov/education>. We found an error in Section I(e1), the linkage to the EPA strategic plan. In particular, the reference to the goal and objective that proposals must support in EPA's strategic plan was incorrect.

The correct reference is that all proposals must support goal five, compliance and environmental stewardship. Objective 5.2, environmental performance through pollution prevention and other stewardship practices. Sub-objective 5.2.1, pollution prevention and promoting environmental stewardship.

We apologize for the error. Please go to our Web site or to <http://www.grants.gov> to see the correct version of the RFP. We are not going to take any questions during this call.

Please send your questions via e-mail to EEgrant@epa.gov if you have any questions during or after this call. Responses will be given via e-mail. Frequent questions will be updated online on our frequently asked questions page, which can be found at epa.gov/education.

Without further ado, Ms. Karen Scott.

Karen Scott: Hi, this is Karen Scott. As Lina said earlier, I'm the program manager for the Environmental Education Grant Program. What I'm going to do is focus my presentation today on various highlights of the current Environmental Education Sub-Grants Program solicitation notice.

First, I'm going to go over the major changes to this year's solicitation. Then, point out – point out other highlights in the RFP. Next, I will go over ways to make your application more competitive.

And, finally, how to submit an application including what documents are needed in the application. It would help if you had a copy of the solicitation notice in front of you as you go through it or make a written note of the section references as I go through them.

By the way, I will sometimes refer to this as the request for proposals, sometimes the RFP or sometimes the solicitation or solicitation notice.

But they all referred to the same thing. So, going over the changes from previous solicitations. While the Office of Environmental Education Grants program has existed since 1990, this particular environmental education grant solicitation is different than any previous grants application opportunity presented by this office.

The current RFP titled, the EPA Environmental Education Sub-Grants Program is mainly different in that. One, it is a program that gives funds to a prime recipient or that is an entity that directly applies for and receives funds from EPA in response to this RFP. So, we prime recipient to award sub-grants to organizations to conduct environmental education activities.

Second, the purpose of the program is to facilitate a requirement in the National Environmental Education Act to award 25 percent of EPA's Environmental Education Grant Programs obligated funding to projects of \$5,000 or less. Remaining funds in your budget may be used to seek and awardees, manage, evaluate the project and the sub-award activities and conduct other eligible activities as defined in the RFP. Such as possibly teacher training workshops or workshops for potential sub-grantees, et cetera.

Third difference, the prime recipient will have a period of two years to reach out to potential candidates for sub-awards, review and select activities to award funds to, conduct oversight on the activities, (AUDIO GAP) it's own project and the sub-award activities and to finalize the project. Fourth major difference, the threshold eligibility requirement, the project be new to the EPA

E.E. program does not apply to this RFP. Since this is a new program, anyone even if you received a grant from us previously may apply for this – for this grant opportunity.

Fifth, an eligible applicant may submit proposals to multiple regional offices. So, you may submit proposals to multiple regional offices under this RFP. But you may submit only one proposal per region. Also, an organization may receive an award as a prime recipient from more than one region under this program.

And sixth, there is an emphasis given to the importance of the prime recipient being part of a network of environmental education professionals and using that network affiliation to enhance the opportunity for success in their sub-grant project. Those were some of the major differences. Now, I'm going to go over some of the more important highlights of the RFP that you should take note of.

First, no grants will be accepted or reviewed by headquarters and no grants will be issued by headquarters. All applications should be sent to the region where the project will take place. See Section VII of the RFP for the appropriate regional agency contact.

All applications will be reviewed and awarded at the regional level. Second, the maximum dollar amount that the prime applicant can propose to receive an EPA fund is \$150,000. Out of that \$150,000, excuse me, exactly \$92,273.50 must be used to fund at least 19 sub-awards of \$5,000 or less.

Third, the project start date in proposals should be no earlier than January 30th 2012. Fourth, in order to be eligible, all projects and proposed activities must be educational in approach and must address at least one of EPA's educational priorities as we've required in previous years and one of EPA's seven key environmental priorities. Fifth, as with previous – the previous RFP that we posted earlier this year, there will be an emphasis on expanding the conversation on environmentalism by including a variety of audiences in proposed projects.

Though, this is not a threshold eligibility requirement. Up to seven points will be awarded during the application review for reaching a diversity of audiences and demonstrating how the project will address environmental issues that are more likely to (AUDIO GAP) the audiences you've targeted. And sixth, as Lina mentioned a few minutes ago, your proposals should support EPA's strategic plan goal five.

That's compliance and environmental stewardship. Objective 5.2, which is improve environmental performance through pollution prevention and other stewardship practices. Sub-objective 5.2.1, which is prevent pollution and promote environmental stewardship.

We apologize again that there was an error in this section of the RFP that was posted on September 9th. Please go to our Web site or to grants.gov. That's <http://www.grants.gov> to see the correct version of the RFP.

In this next part of my presentation, I'm going to go over how to make your application more competitive. First and foremost, read the solicitation documents thoroughly before starting to write your proposals. Pay especially close attention to the definitions of environmental education and EPA's educational priorities in Section I.b and I.c and the list of EPA's environmental priorities in Section I.c.

Then, go to the threshold eligibility requirements in Section III. Among those threshold eligibility requirements are. One, make your application – make sure your application is complete before submitting it.

An application missing sections or otherwise being incomplete may be eliminated for further consideration. Second in the threshold eligibility requirement, meet the application deadline, which is November 8th 2011. Your proposals or applications must be postmarked by that date by the postal service or commercial delivery service or finalized and submitted into grants.gov by the 11:59 P.M., Eastern Standard Time.

Third of our eligibility requirements, make it clear you are an eligible entity. We cannot give awards to individual students or individual educators. Make

sure that you also explain how you will ensure that the sub-awards that you're going to be giving out will go to eligible entities as well.

We explain the eligible entities in the RFP and I will list them here. First, a local education agency or local government agency that can demonstrate an education or environmental mandate would be eligible. Also, a college or university and community colleges or a state education or environmental agency or a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Note that only 501(c)(3) nonprofits are the type of nonprofits we can fund. Or a noncommercial educational broadcasting entity would be eligible. And, finally, a tribal education agency would be eligible.

Fourth among eligibility criteria. Clearly show that you have a 25 percent match and where it will come from. It can come from cash or in-kind services, from your own organization or from a third party.

Also, make sure that it is 25 percent of the total budget and that your math is correct. Fifth, do not ask for more than \$150,000. Sixth, be sure your project is primarily educational and identify at least one EPA educational priority you will focus on in your project.

EPA defines educational priorities in the RFP and I will list them here. Capacity building, educational advancement, (AUDIO GAP), human health and the environment, environmental education teaching skills and career development. All of these as I said are defined in the RFP in Section I.c.

And, seventh, among eligibility criteria, identify at least one environmental priority you will focus on in your project. These are priorities that have been identified by EPA's administrator and I will list them here. They're also listed in the solicitation notice.

Taking action on climate change, improving air quality, assuring the safety of chemicals, cleaning up our communities, protecting America's waters, expanding the conversation on environmentalism and working for environmental justice and building strong state and tribal partnerships.

Again, these priorities are listed in Section I.c of the solicitation notice. And, finally, you cannot propose any ineligible activities for yourself or for the sub-grantees. EPA considers that following to be ineligible activities.

Technical training of environmental management professionals, information or outreach without an educational focus, advocacy promoting a particular point of view, lobbying or political activity, non-educational research or development and construction projects.

Since we have gotten a lot of questions about construction projects in both Section III of the solicitation notice and online in our frequently asked questions, we further clarify what we mean by construction projects. So, those were ineligible activities that I just listed.

Now, I will go on to telling you about some tips for developing a successful grant application. We also have online a document by that same title, Tips for Developing Successful Grant Application. And it's on our Web site at www.epa.gov/education.

I'll go over some of the tips from this document right now. First, on the needs of the sub-grant community you will be reaching, as well as on sound environmental science and educational principles that aim to enhance critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills.

Second, have a clear focus and clearly define your measurable quantitative and qualitative outputs that you will complete during the project period including both your outputs and outcomes as the prime recipient and those of the sub-awardees activities.

We have included a sample logic model in chart form in Appendix C to show examples of the outputs and outcomes we expect to see from projects and activities funded under this RFP. Third, include long-term environmental and educational outcomes in your proposal, especially in the logic model. It is especially important to make sure your project and the sub-awardees activities promote environmental stewardship and show actual results. Fourth, choose your sub-grant audience carefully and explain why this audience was chosen.

If you are reaching diverse populations, including but not limited to low income minority and tribal communities, be sure to explain that in your proposal. Also, explain how the environmental issue you have chosen to focus on may affect the audience for your project. Fifth, have a realistic timeline and budget.

We expect these to be two-year projects. Your timeline must show how you will seek good candidates for sub-awards, select the best candidates for sub-awards, make the awards and then manage, evaluate and finalize them in the two-year period. Your budget should be clear to understand, and includes the required 25 percent match.

And that is 25 percent of your total budget, not 25 percent of the federal fund's request. So, those are some of the most important tips. But do go to the Tips for Developing Successful Grant Applications on our Web site to get more tips, more information about how to make your grant applications successful.

Now, I'm going to go over how to submit your application. Section IV of the solicitation goes into detail about the necessary contents of a submitted application or proposal. Please read this section carefully and do not submit extra, unnecessary materials like maps, brochures, CDs, et cetera, that are not part of the materials we require for you to submit.

You can submit your app in one of two ways. A hardcopy submission or an electronic submission. If you choose to submit a hardcopy, you will need to submit an original and two copies by U.S. Postal Service or commercial delivery service, postmarked by 11:59 P.M., local time on November 8th 2011 and addressed to the regional contact in the region in which your project will be located.

Please see Section VII for the list of states in each region and the names and addresses of the people and offices to whom you should send your application. Hand deliveries will also be accepted, but only during core business hours of 9 A.M. to 4 P.M., local time through November 8th 2011.

All the forms you need for a hardcopy submission can be found on our Web site, www.epa.gov/education.

If you choose to submit electronically, you need to go online to the site, grants.gov at least a week before you intend to submit your application and register. Have an authorized representative from your organization do that registration as soon as possible as process is quite lengthy and could take you as long as a week to complete. All the forms you need for submission can be found on the grants.gov site.

You must complete your submission by 11:59 P.M., Eastern Standard Time on November 8th 2011. Now, I'm going to go through the contents for your submission. Section IV.c of the solicitation notice, as well as appendix B checklist for submission have a lot more detail. So, please look at those while making your developing your proposal and before you make your submission.

The first thing you will need in your submission is a Standard Form 424, which is the application for federal assistance. You will also need a Standard Form 424A, which is your budget information. Next, you will need to submit a work plan, not to exceed seven pages, single space.

Your work plan will consist of three parts. A project summary, which should be no long – no more than one page. A brief overview only.

Next in the work plan should be a project description. And this should be the meat of your proposal. This is where you provide us details of your planned project including the what, why, how and who.

That is what kind of sub-grants you are proposing to award and why, how you will select and award the sub-grants and who the audience will be for those. And, finally, in your work plan, you need a project evaluation. Please see our solicitation notice in Section IV where we list – where we give you a link to a Web site that has some very good ideas on how to create an evaluation plan for an E.E. project.

So, those three parts; the project summary, project description and project evaluation; are what make up that work plan and the work plan cannot exceed

seven pages. Besides the S.F. 424, the S.F. 424A and the work plan, you also need a detailed budget narrative. In that detailed budget narrative, you also need to include a description of your nonfederal match.

Note that the budget narrative is not included in that seven-page limit. It is not considered to be part of the work plan. Also, not part of the work plan but a necessary part of your submission would be the appendices.

The appendices are not included in that seven-page limit and they include a timeline, a logic model, which I described a little bit before that would include both your outputs and outcomes and those of your expected sub-grantees. And also among the appendices should be your programmatic capability and past performance document. This is where you will list past federal grants, especially ones you received from the EPA.

Those are all the documents you need for your submission. Please review Section V before making your submission because that will show you the maximum number of points you can receive for each section of your proposal or application. This will give you an idea of where we put the most importance or weight.

We used a 100-point scale. Applications will be reviewed by EPA staff and/or external review teams. The applications will be scored and ranked and referred to selection officials.

EPA staff will also brief the selection official on how the ranked proposals compared to one another as to the proposed variety and range of educational and EPA priorities, environmental issues, geographic areas and audiences addressed among the sub-awardee activities. Note that the selection officials may consider this information in making the final selection in order to ensure an efficient and effective use of federal funds. Please check with the EPA regional contacts that verification has been received.

But do give them a few days to get it into the system before contacting them. It could take several months before you hear as to whether or not you have been given an award. And that concludes my presentation.

Lina Younes: If you have any questions, please send them to EEgrant@epa.gov. I repeat, EEgrant@epa.gov. This is a highly competitive program.

Based on our experience with volume of applications received in response to our past solicitation, we anticipate that most likely we will be able to fund less than 10 percent of the applications received. So, be very meticulous in writing and submitting your proposals. This is the last of three conference calls held nationally.

To provide information about our E.E. Sub-Grants RFP, audio recordings and transcripts of these calls will be posted on our Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/education>. Best of luck to all of you. Thank you for your interest in environmental education and in this program and thank you for participating in today's call.

We hope it could help you answer your questions. This now concludes this conference call.

Operator: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This concludes today's conference call. You may now disconnect.

END